

The American Small Town: Twentieth-Century Place Images

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position from new, less traditional factions and schisms. Religious fragmentation compounded the instability resulting from economic dislocation and political insufficiency.

With middle-class Scots seeking something to provide a moral direction in a time of flux, the abolition of American slavery attracted a considerable following, especially after the American movement polarized between Garrison and the moderates in the early 1840s. Each group accused the other of moral error, and Scots leaped into the fray—Old Kirk with the moderates and New Kirk and reformers with the Garrisonian radicals. Further enhancing the attractiveness of the radical position for dissenting Scots was the fact that the British anti-slavery society tended to support the conservative position. Abolition was a means of opposing the old powers when all other avenues appeared to be closed.

Rice stresses the divergence of the Scottish from other abolitionist movements, but he also notes the interaction between American and Scot, and he emphasizes that a major result of the Scots taking sides in the American dispute was the increased polarization of American society prior to the Civil War. Also, Rice describes the waning of Scottish radicalism when society re-stabilized in the 1850s.

The Scots Abolitionists, 1833-1861 is intended specifically for an American audience. Unfortunately, Rice assumes a greater familiarity with Scottish history than is common in most non-specialist American historians. As a result, Rice's argument is sometimes hard to follow. But unfamiliarity with each specific should not prohibit the non-expert reader from gaining some insight into and appreciation for an obscure but hardly insignificant movement, especially one that had some influence on a vital period in American history.

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The American Small Town: Twentieth-Century Place Images, by John A. Jakle. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982. pp. 195. Bibliography, index. \$25.00.

John Jakle's new book is a thought-provoking study of the American small town. However, it is not limited to presenting and analyzing the images of that type of community—in spite of what his subtitle indicates. There is much in the book about the reality of small-town life as well.

In his preface, the author asserts, "I am concerned to describe the idea of the typical American town—to identify the prevailing social

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stereotypes which Americans used to picture the small town as a distinctive kind of place, and to describe the elements of landscape which traditionally served to symbolize that place type" (p. 1). But he also provides much sociological commentary about small-town commerce, social interaction, family life, and so on. Fortunately, *The American Small Town* is more significant because the author focuses not only on images but on the various factors which produced, contradicted, and changed them.

In fact, the book offers an anatomy of the small town — with an emphasis on the difference between image and reality — during the pre-automobile and post-automobile eras of the twentieth century. (The historical scope of *The American Small Town* is limited to the first half of the century.) Hence, Jakle's discussion of the ways in which the coming of the car, and the highway that followed after it, changed the small town is probably the most valuable aspect of the book.

The study has no significant shortcomings, but it should be noted that the emphasis is on midwestern communities. For that reason, those with a special interest in other parts of the country may find the discussion somewhat less useful.

Jakle's most important sources of information about small-town stereotypes are novels and photographs, although memoirs and sociological studies are also used. Perhaps the essence of the book's uniqueness lies in his successful blending of those materials. The 120 photographs that are scattered throughout the study are well related to the main concepts of the discussion by the author's perceptive comments. In fact, any one who wants to develop an ability to interpret old photographs would do well to spend some time with this volume.

The American Small Town is well annotated and the bibliography is excellent, listing the most important twentieth-century novels, memoirs, essays, and studies about the small town in our country. The index is thorough, including a wide variety of topics ("Family reunions," "Interurban railroads," "Male dominated places," etc.) as well as authors and towns.

Without question, the book should be required reading for any geographer, sociologist, or historian with an interest in the small town or indeed, in American culture during the twentieth century. The general public might simply regard it as an inviting photo album that takes readers well beneath the surface of American small-town culture decades ago.

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